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Review of 'Maoists at the Hearth: Everyday Life in Nepal's Civil War' by Judith Pettigrew

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Sagar Rijal on *Dirty, Sacred Rivers: Confronting South Asia's Water Crisis*

the pessimistic reality of the present day Ganga.

Each instance of the numerous environmental challenges shows complex and multi-faceted localized, interstate and global causes and implications. The holy water of the Yamuna by Delhi is pitch black with pollution because more than half of raw human sewage is directly dumped into the river daily, like every other city in the region. Another issue common to the region's cities is the chronic water shortage due to rapid population growth and unmanaged urbanization. Colopy traces deeply into the economic and political roots of Kathmandu's battle with water shortage only to find that there are no easy answers even from the technocrats and hydro-experts. Because the rivers flow across borders, interstate concerns and conflicts along with global water regimes, inform the bilateral relations between Nepal and India in the case of the recurring floods caused by the Koshi River, and between India and Bangladesh in the case of the Farraka barrage, built about eleven miles away from where the Ganges enters Bangladeshi territory, denying the lower riparian country its fair share of freshwater. Above all such concerns hangs the specter of global warming which could cause the glaciers in the Himalayas—"the water towers of Asia"—to melt and retreat, producing cycles of destructive floods and draughts, long-term intolerable water scarcity in the entire region, and environmental destruction of the whole watershed.

Colopy brings to life these seemingly disparate but yet interconnected manifestations of the South Asian water crisis using her keen and detailed observations, which are augmented with insights from local informers, activists and experts, although there is a marked dearth of the official voices from politicians or policymakers. Any academic or researcher working on aspects of environmental issues in South Asia may benefit from her accounts of on-the-ground reality. However, some readers may find that, just like the meandering river that it explores, the book hops from one place to another and takes many surprising and leisurely turns, chasing a number of interesting, even only tangentially related phenomena and personalities. Thus, there is a chapter in the form of a travel diary of the author's trek to view the depleting glaciers in the Rolwaling region of Nepal; another on an endangered-dolphin sighting trip in Bihar; and yet another on Kathmandu's traditional water spouts. However, as a work of narrative journalism aimed at an ostensibly Western audience, Colopy's work, often meditative and lyrical, humanizes the region, its people and their daily struggles in the face of rapidly changing natural environment along the Ganges basin.

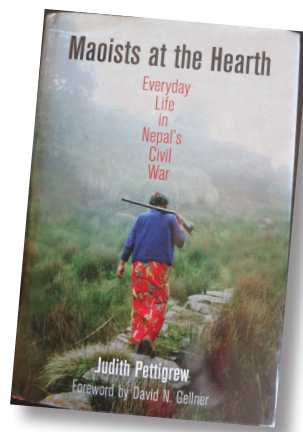
Sagar Rijal defended his dissertation entitled "In Search of Autonomy: Nepal as a Wedge State Between India and China" at the Graduate Program in International Studies at Old Dominion University in December 2014.

Maoists at the Hearth: Everyday Life in Nepal's Civil War.

Judith Pettigrew. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013. 188 pages. ISBN 9780812244922.

Reviewed by Matthew W. Maycock

The decade long Maoist insurgency (1996-2006) in Nepal has had a range of significant and still unfolding consequences for Nepali society, particularly in the rural areas in which the Maoists exerted relatively more influence than urban areas. Throughout the 188 pages of *Maoists at the Hearth*, Judith Pettigrew convincingly outlines a personal and compelling account of everyday rural life during the Maoist insurgency. Essentially, Pettigrew argues that the civil war did not suspend social processes and lives in villages, but that the 'everyday' was reshaped in response to an evolving and shifting set of challenging and dangerous situations. In contrast to much of the existing scholarship on the Maoist insurgency that has focused on why the insurgency took place, Pettigrew focuses on the lived experiences of the insurgency in a Gurung village, Kwei Nasa, with which she has a longstanding connection. The ethnographic methods and person-centred descriptions Pettigrew employs provide insights that are perhaps uniquely possible through ethnographic approaches to data collection and analysis.



Kwei Nasa, a Tamang village located in central Nepal, was in an area during the conflict that was neither entirely under Maoist or government control. Therefore, the villagers had to navigate between competing and conflicting demands and pressures. According to Pettigrew, for example, villagers were very careful to identify any soldiers in the vicinity of the village, and to not be associated with either the Maoist or Nepal Army, due to assumed negative consequences. The book focuses on the everyday to illuminate and explore how ideas of normality were sustained and replicated at a time of conflict that was far from normal in Kwei Nasa. The rich detail of the everyday prior to, during, and after the conflict provides insights into the necessary adaptations the villagers in Kwei Nasa made during the Maoist insurgency. Specifically, Pettigrew focuses on the adaptations made by villagers and changing relationships and interactions with Maoist cadre when they were in the village. During these times Pettigrew explores the complex and evolving negotiation of alternative forms of authority between villagers and the Maoist cadre. The focus on the lived experience of the conflict, including some of the human rights abuses experienced by the villagers, provides important and often overlooked consequences of the insurgency for villages such as Kwei Nasa.

Pettigrew's focus throughout on the agency of the villagers is also welcome, and this is examined

through a consideration of the strategies and creativity of the villagers in often very challenging situations. For example, this manifested in new expectations around when to talk and when to be silent, as well as subtle changes in the meaning of familiar symbols and associated meanings in the village. For example, because Gurungs constituted a significant proportion of the Maoist cadre, knowing who to trust became increasingly complicated in the village. Furthermore, simple things such as having polished boots were taken as an indication that the person wearing them was most likely associated with the Nepal Army.

The detailed focus on everyday life during the Maoist insurgency constitutes an important contribution to scholarship on the consequences and lived experiences of war. However, this does mean that there is relatively little detailed analysis of the reasons and motivations for many Nepalis who joined the insurgency. This remains a particularly important question, given the strong support for the Maoists particularly in rural areas. Furthermore, a more detailed description of the historical evolution of the Maoist movement in Nepal would have further strengthened the understanding of the multiple reasons why the Maoists received significant support in rural Nepal.

Given that Pettigrew's knowledge and engagement with everyday life within Kwei Nasa significantly predates the start of the Maoist insurgency

in 1996, she is able to contextualize both the continuity and change the village exhibits during and after the decade long insurgency. Based on several decades of fieldwork, this is a landmark book that will shape discussions and analysis of this crucial period in Nepal's history for many years. This book makes an important contribution to both Nepali and South Asian scholarship both in Anthropology and Conflict Studies, examining in rich and compelling detail the implications of the Maoist movement in Nepal.

Matthew Maycock completed his PhD thesis from the University of East Anglia in 2012, focusing on masculinities in post-conflict Nepal, specifically considering the experiences of a group of recently freed bonded labourers. This complements a long held interest in research on masculinity with a particular focus on South Asia and especially Nepal. His current research focuses on masculinity and health in a number of Scottish prisons.